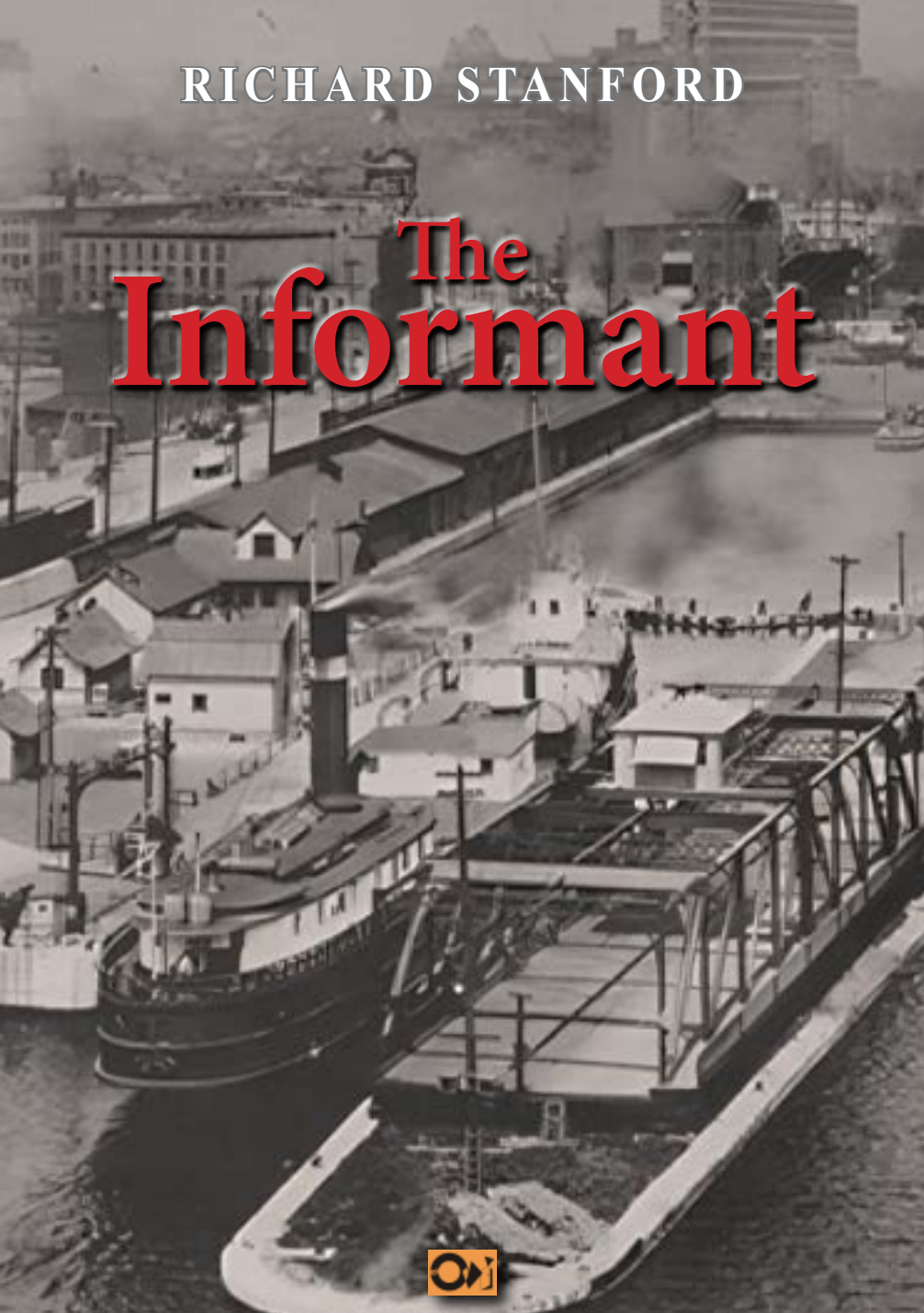
RICHARD STANFORD

The Informant



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The phone started up again. One…Two… Three rings. Not another conversation. His throat was dry. His ear felt like it was pressed flat against his skull. Four…Five. The still humid air, the sweat dripping down his back, the thought of standing up was painful. Nine-thirty. Through the open windows he heard the idle chattering from Market Square where couples walked in slow-motion under the glittering streetlamps. Six… Seven, screeching now. The teletype machines joined in, clattering bulletins from London and Paris. His notebook was full of shorthand transcripts of phone conversations. It had been one of those 'nothing-is-ready-days', panic to deadline, reporters lost in traffic. But they had managed to put the late edition to

bed. There was the bus crash out on Highway 9, three passengers killed. A grim day. A councilman was forced to resign. A leap over the Joyceville Prison wall. How an inmate could have gotten up the energy to do such a thing in this heat is best explained by desperation. Eight…Nine… Dammit! Where the hell is everybody? "Everyone's gone home," a voice from the other side of the newsroom. Not yet.

"Hello, city desk!"

The telephone line sang with static. He heard a voice, soft and certain. "Hello, I'd like to speak to Wallace Lloyd-Craig, please."

She sounded like a librarian.

"You got him. What can I do for you, ma'am?" Oh no, he thought. She wants a story on the wonders of libraries.

"I need to speak with you in confidence," she said with a whisper.

"Every call with me is in confidence, ma'am." Silence. He heard a deep breath. "Maybe you can start by telling me who you are."

"Well, we met several years ago and you're the only

journalist I've ever known…….And I have to speak to a journalist."

The singing on the line cracked. "Where are you calling from?"

"Montréal. We met in 1939 when you came to the Dominion Shipyards. You were doing an article about the navy frigates being built here for the war."

"Oh yes," he said, recalling it as the last time he visited Aunt Emma but the shipyard was a vague memory. "And you remember me?"

"As I said, I've never met a journalist, so yes, you were easy to remember."

Another long pause. He waited her out. Finally, "I have some very important information that I want you to look at. No one's been killed or anything."

"That's a relief, but you'll have to tell me who you are."

"Right." More hesitation. "For now it'll have to be Miss Smith."

"How original. All right, *Miss Smith*, why don't you go a reporter in Montréal. There are several good ones there."

"As I said, you're the only journalist I know."

Wallace racked his weary brain, trying to remember this woman he *might* have spoken to seven years ago. An entire war had happened since. "How long did we talk to each other?"

"About two minutes."

"Two minutes?" said Wallace opening the desk drawers and scrounging around for old notebooks.

"Mr. Craig, if all I have to base my trust on right now is a two minute conversation, that's going to have to be good enough for you."

Now Wallace was silent. There was certainty in her voice. He has moved on stories with less than this. "All right. But I can't get to Montréal for a few days yet. I have…"

"No, I'll come to Kingston. It's better we meet there. I don't want anyone to see me talking to you. I'm sorry, I don't mean it like…

"It's all right, Miss Smith. I understand."

It was arranged that she would take the train to Kingston the next day and rendez-vous at Morrison's

Coffee Shop next door to the *Kingston Chronicle* building.

The following morning Wallace was sitting in his usual window booth in Morrison's looking out at Market Square and the train station across the street from City Hall. He had finished reading his morning dose of the first editions: *The Globe & Mail, New York Times, Washington Post, Montreal Gazette.* He left the front page of *The Gazette* face-up and stared at the stark photograph, 3 columns wide, top of the fold - the caption: *July 6, 1946: 50,000 feet of radioactive cloud: Hurling itself skyward after the atomic bomb burst over Bikini Atoll. Eyewitnesses some 18 miles from the burst said there was only a small, sharp shock after the explosion, not the mighty rushing wind that had been expected.*

The morning was hot, humid, the sky glared through the steamed windows. The other *Chronicle* reporters had left, fanning out across the city for their stories. Kingston did not have the news intensity of Montréal or Toronto, and certainly not of New York, yet there was no shortage of stories to cover, between the nine prisons making Kingston the capital of incarcerations, and the councilmen who were forever lining their pockets by picking the pockets of others.

Marge brought Wallace another cup of coffee and a smile. Journalists were always allowed to linger here, they were the clientele twenty-four hours a day, they paid the rent, giving Marge and the owner, Olivier, a sense of pride that their coffee shop was nicknamed Editorial Two. The remaining clientele, the students, the city hall staffers, were also allowed to linger but they would have to tolerate the arguments over proper lead-lines or the Prime Minister as a blockhead.

Nine years ago Simon O'Hara had lured Wallace away from *The Sentinel*, likely sensing its looming demise. Any dream that the newspaper would rise from the ashes had long since been dashed by the war. Simon had retired from *The Chronicle* and there was a new editor. Some things had changed but this place had not and Wallace feared that at the age of forty, something had passed him by, he just hadn't figured out what. By his age his father had travelled the world, seeking out Henri Dunant in the Parisian underground, riding roughshod on a train through the Russian Revolution with a vainglorious Canadian. But his father was also dead, brought down by the work he loved. Wallace heard the whistle. The 10:30 was coming in.

He readied his notebook, writing left-handed the date, time and place, left the subject name blank and

looked out the window. Out of the steam mist of the locomotive emerged Hoop Jr. walking alongside a tall woman. Hoop Jr. was a new Rupert's Rogue hired on for the summer, thirteen years old, five feet tall but walked like he was six. The duo made their way past the vegetable stalls across Market Square. Miss Smith was in animated conversation with Hoop, her hands painting arcs in the air, her floral-patterned cotton dress swaying like a curtain in time with her steps. They dodged through traffic crossing the street to Morrison's. Hoop Jr. led her to Wallace's booth. He stood to greet her.

"This is Miss Smith, sir."

Wallace shook her hand.

"Hoop Jr. tells me he's named after a horse," she said playfully.

Hoop Jr. shrugged.

"So he is. Winner of the Kentucky Derby last year," said Wallace.

"So, you name children after a horse?"

"Everybody's named after something, ma'am," said Hoop Jr. "Now, is there anything you need, sir?"

"Yes, Hoop," said Wallace handing Hoop Jr. a piece of paper. "I need you to get this book for me at the public library, please, and while you're at it get one for yourself."

"Yes, sir," and he ran out.

"Shouldn't he be in school?"

"He is in school," said Wallace gesturing to the seat across from him, "Please," he said, thinking: I haven't known her one minute and already she's asking *me* questions.

Once seated, she placed her briefcase gently at her side, her purse next to it. "So that's how it is. A newspaper substitutes as school and running errands is job experience?"

This was going to be a long day. "Miss Smith, that boy has more vocabulary than most of the Queen's University students down the street and more experience than someone twice his age. I assure you I'm not engaged in child labour, the boy is paid, he is in school, a *real* school, and it's summer holidays. We have a whole slew of lads, a regular corral come to think of it. Now would you like some coffee or something to eat?"

"I wouldn't mind some tea."

"Fine, we'll get you tea. Then you'll tell me who you are and what you've got in that case which you've been holding onto like it was a bomb."

Marge come to the booth and took her order for tea with lemon, no milk. Despite the humidity, not a bead of sweat showed on Miss Smith's alabaster face. Her green eyes were bright and inquisitive, her hair short reddish-blonde, her lips narrow and moist, no wedding ring, mid-thirties. She possessed a formal reserve, a firmness of the chin as she leaned back. Marge brought the tea and left.

"So?" said Wallace.

She sighed. "My name is Lydia Beecher. When you saw me in '39, I was working in the secretarial pool in administration at Dominion. I was promoted and eventually became the executive secretary to the president of the company."

"Very impressive," said Wallace, looking straight into her eyes.

She had never been looked at like that before with eyes so intense, almost glaring. He listened without nodding or tilting his head. She opened the briefcase

on the table and took out a file folder. "I work exclusively for the president, Mr. William Larson. His office has its own budget, separate from the rest of the company, and he has sole signing authority. If he needs funds for travel expenses, or consulting fees, or office supplies, I arrange for the cheques to be written up by the comptroller and Mr. Larson signs them. He either cashes them himself or I send them out."

Lydia opened the file folder and laid out ten cheques, spreading them open on the table like she was dealing a poker hand. She explained that at the end of the each month she renders the bank statement and balances the office account. Each of the cheques was made out to a numbered company with amounts from five thousand to twenty thousand dollars. "None of these companies exists except as a post office box in the village of Pointe-Fortune, Québec. Have you ever been there?"

"No, but I expect you have."

"Indeed. Pointe-Fortune straddles the border with Ontario on the highway to Ottawa. It's a lovely village, French colonial houses, charming waterfront restaurant. There's a ferry that takes you across the Ottawa River. I wanted to confirm with the postmaster that this box was registered and if mail was ever

picked up. He told me it was but he wasn't permitted to tell me by whom."

Lydia had figured out who it was. At the records office for corporate registrations she got the names of the owners of the numbered companies, a Mr. Paulson and a Mr. Lemieux. She knew both of these men. They were bureaucrats in the Defense Department in charge of procurements – government contracts for the production of materials by private companies. Paulson and Lemieux had been in the Larson's office several times over the past two years. They had meetings but they also had dinners, rounds of golf, and more dinners all at very high-end restaurants. Lydia knew this because she had made the reservations. All this was happening when Dominion Shipyards was making bids to the Defense Department for the frigates and submarines.

"You're suggesting these are bribes," said Wallace. "But why would Dominion, with its expertise of building naval vessels, resort to that?"

"Fear of peace," said Lydia with a bite. "A year before the war ended, military production started winding down. They had enough to finish the war. Dominion knew it was coming to an end along with the gravy train. Once the war was over, that would be it, no more frigates."

"So why didn't Dominion switch gears, start building other kinds of ships?"

"It's a whole different thing to build a passenger liner and much more difficult to get contracts. No, the navy was always a sure thing until 1944. Even as it is, the contract we got was for only one frigate. And it was at double the cost of the competing shipbuilder in Quebec City."

Wallace didn't doubt her but he had to know her motivation and sometimes a single woman's motives maybe more complicated than civil responsibility. "You realize if we publish this story it'll go national. Other newspapers will follow-up. You may be putting yourself at considerable risk, you could lose your job." He waited. He wasn't satisfied yet. "I need to ask you a question. Are you having an affair with Mr. Larson?"

Lydia almost choked on her tea. "You think I'm a jilted mistress, out for revenge because he wouldn't leave his wife," she said sternly. "I assure, Mr. Lloyd-Craig, I'm not that stupid. I was never Mr. Larson's mistress. The idea makes my skin crawl. No, my motive is exactly as you see it. Besides being illegal, it's unethical to leverage taxpayers' money to make instruments of war when there is no war. Yes, I may lose my job, I'm aware of that."

"Well, I can tell you one thing Miss Beecher. If you want to be a journalist, you have all the makings of a good one. The work you've done here is quite something."

"I don't know if I'd be a good journalist. I'd get too emotionally involved. Objectivity is not one of my strong suits."

"Nor mine. I come from a long line of non-objective reporting."

"I know."

"You do?"

"I didn't come to you because you're the only journalist I know. You were quite right in saying that there are many good reporters in Montréal. I've come to you because I read many of the articles your mother Emma Lloyd-Craig wrote about the Persons Case. I was very interested in her stories and interviews she did with Nellie McClung."

"Emma is not my mother. She's my aunt, my father's sister."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Lloyd-Craig is not a very common surname and…"

"It's all right. But why the Persons Case?"

She paused and shook her head, looking out the window. "It astounded me that women had to go to court to prove they were persons. That's what your aunt was writing about. Everybody thought it was a great victory. Is it a victory to go to the Supreme Court to argue such an idea in the first place? Your aunt was angry and many other women were, too, including me. I think that's why I got the promotion. I swore I would never again accept anything that was beneath my talents." She ran her fingers over her mouth, considering her next words. "But given what I now know, I wonder how long that will last. Would you mind," she said putting her hand out, touching his forearm. "I am absolutely starving and it smells so good in here."

"Of course, Miss Beecher, anything you like."

"Call me Lydia."

Lydia suddenly reverted to an almost impish behavior, rubbing her hands together as she looked over the menu. She ordered a full course meal with vegetable soup, a plate of home fries, scrambled eggs and toast, coffee, apple pie with ice cream passing on any suggestion of bacon or sausage. A grimace passed

over her face when Marge told her the sausage came with the meal but Lydia waved it away. When the food came, she dived in with the delight of a child opening presents on Christmas morning.

After lunch Wallace took Lydia up to *The Chronicle* newsroom on the second floor. Lydia harboured the illusion that because newspapers thrived on the written word a newsroom must be like the reading room of a library. Instead, the *Chronicle* newsroom was an anarchy of people in motion, either on their feet or at their desks. A bluish haze of cigarette smoke hung over the room. The Rogues ran down the stairs, hopped between the desks and two of them sat quietly on a bench at the door to the editor's office, leaning forward, ready. The telephones, the rattle of the teletype machines – a cross between a sewing machine and a drill – the clattering of typewriters, the rumble of pneumatic tubes, shouts of "Copy!" Sunlight poured in through the large arched windows spanning two walls, all open to the Lake but offering scant relief from the heat. Wallace led the way through the maze of desks to one in a far corner. He removed his jacket and tossed it onto a cot next to the wall behind the desk. It looked like a comfort zone, the pillow and blanket had the ruffled valleys of recent use as well as books stacked on the floor and a curio lamp

mounted into the wall. Wallace sat down in front of a typewriter, opened his notebook and began typing, all the while asking Lydia questions about the operations of the company, the prices on the other bids for the contract compared to Dominion's bid; the golf course, the restaurants, the hotels.

Lydia interrupted, "How do you work in this racket?"

"What racket?" said Wallace, befuddled. He looked around the room. "Today's a quiet day."

"This seems like a busy town?"

"It's going to get a hell of a lot busier soon," he said returning to his typing. He had to bring in a Montréal reporter to follow-up on leads and to share the byline. He couldn't be seen to be treading on another newspaper's territory.

"Territory?" said Lydia. "You sound like the Mafia."

"What do you know about the Mafia?"

Lydia laughed. "I *live* in Montreal."

Given her exalted position with a large company, there was little doubt Lydia would know about

the wide open city of Montréal: casinos, nightclubs, brothels, all paid for by protection money to the police and local politicians. It was also the centre of the most vibrant artistic activity in the entire country. The city never slept, the lights on Ste.Catherine Street were always on.

"I'm getting a reporter from Montreal anyway, help with the footwork. Regardless, *The Chronicle* will be the paper-of-record."

Wallace telephoned Damien Chamberlan at the *La Presse*who agreed to work on the story from there as long as *La Presse* could print follow-ups. Wallace had to type up the briefing notes for Damien.

"I know how to type," said Lydia.

"I'm sure you can. Just sit back and relax. I'll need you to write out some other things…contacts, names."

Hoop Jr. came running in. "I got it, sir," dropping a book on the desk.

"What did you get for yourself?"

"*Gulliver's Travels*, sir."

"Good, great book," said Wallace writing on a piece of paper and handing it to Hoop Jr. "A Class B frigate. I want you to go over the Military College, find some naval officer and ask him for a picture of one of these. Or go to their library, there must be something in there. If you have to, make a drawing. You're good at that."

"Yes, sir!" he said with glee and ran out.

"Now I know why you name them after race horses," said Lydia.

"Thoroughbreds. To be specific."

Adding to the bedlam, Lydia felt thrumming coming up from the floor. Wallace sensed her concern: "The presses, late edition. Okay, we need a timeline."

Over the next few hours, they reviewed the sequence of visits from Lemieux and Paulson to Dominion, timed out with the dates of the contract applications, records of phone calls, correspondence, the golf dates, the fine dining, and of course the dates of the cheques. As Wallace typed out the timeline, Lydia wandered over to the three teletype machines. Pages streamed out of the frenzied printer: bulletins from all over Europe. Lydia read one:

Dateline- Marseille, France. 6 July 1946. The Red Cross has established a camp for approximately 2,000 Jewish refugees released over a year ago from the death camp Treblinka in Poland. The refugees have walked through Germany, Belgium, France in an attempt to return to their homes that have been either destroyed or confiscated. These and several other European countries have refused to grant the Jews asylum. The Red Cross is working to secure a ship that will take them to Palestine.

"Those are wire services, Reuters, Hearst, Associated Press," said Wallace. "We're part of the network syndication. May I see that one?"

A copy boy tore off the other bulletins and hurried back to his desk. The Rogues ran in and out of the editorial room, their shoes clicking on the stairs, fanning out across Market Square. One remained sitting on a bench next to the editor's office. A tall man came out of the office and looked around the newsroom. He saw Wallace, walked to his desk and picked up the copy pages next to the typewriter. He leaned against the wall next to the window and began to read. He was tall, somewhat aloof, wearing a vest over an open shirt and shining black cowboy boots covering the lower half of his suit pants. Lydia

thought this odd mix of styles and the scowl on his face suggested that nothing in his life ever pleased him.

"This is our editor, John Winchester," said Wallace.

Winchester did not look up from his reading.

"Hello," said Lydia, "I'm….

Winchester raised his hand palm up: "I don't want to know your name."

Wallace glanced at Lydia, gesturing to say: it's all right.

Winchester wrote several notes on the last page. "Make sure you corroborate those restaurants and the golf courses. We'll need dates and times and whomever else was there."

"And the anonymous source?"

Winchester said, "I'm fine with that," and as he walked away he paused in front of her, said, "Thank you," and stalked back to his office.

"What was that all about?" said Lydia.

"It's a way of saying you were never here. He's protecting you as a source."

"From whom?"

"Well, if some lawyer were to ask him under oath if he ever saw you here, he'll say, Who? It's being rendered a nobody, like a Miss Smith and you're obviously comfortable with that. There is one thing I want to know. All this work you've done…Why?"

"Shouldn't a person have a social conscience?"

"Of course. But a story like this could close down Dominion, the workers lose their jobs."

Lydia leaned back and stared at Wallace severely. "Where do you think that money went? Do you think if the contract came in at double the cost that the crews would get double the salary? The shareholders will make the money, not the crews. This is corruption and the house is playing with taxpayers' money. *That's* why I'm doing this."

Night rolled in, the thrumming relentless under the floorboards, the telephones went quiet. Lydia looked over the newsroom as the reporters typed and the editors slashed through copy with red pencils. Hundreds of stories, each with meaning for hundreds of readers and hers was but one that could get lost under-the-fold on page ten. Abruptly through the

open windows came the wail of a train whistle and the grinding of brakes. Lydia went to the window: "Damn! That's my train. Can I make it!?"

She didn't wait for an answer. She grabbed her briefcase and ran out with Wallace. They made it halfway across Market Square when the Montréal-bound train pulled out under a thick cloud of black smoke. The heat enveloped them. They had to catch their breaths and let the breeze from the lake cool them.

"I'll have to… get…a hotel room," said Lydia.

"There's plenty of room in my house. I have a guest room. You're welcome to stay."

Lydia accepted his offer. She had been with enough men to know who was sincere - who had ulterior motives - and who was not. Some had been intelligent or good-looking or a brave soldier or even rich but none of them had *it*. There had been talk of marriage with one. He was a "solid man", a banker and had purchased a bungalow in one of the new suburban developments in the west island of Montréal. Lydia wanted none of it. Work. That's what she wanted more than anything – a purpose, a career. She didn't have the nerve to tell Wallace that she hadn't brought

enough money with her and would likely have had to sleep on a bench in the station. After having dinner in a pub off Market Square they walked up Princess Street.

Walking with Wallace proved somewhat…extended. He was the slowest walker she had ever seen, trailing slightly behind while taking in the shop windows or a car driving by. Everything seemed to merit a slow steady gaze. She asked him why.

"I spend my whole day operating at the speed of light. This is me unwinding."

He finally unwound himself at the front door of a modest two-storey red brick house on a quiet street off Princess. He turned on the lights, walked down the hallway to the kitchen, "I'll make tea."

Lydia found herself surrounded by framed paintings hanging on the walls of the dining room, hallway and living room, three or four high, and it seemed to her to be at least forty, maybe fifty, panoramic landscapes and portraits and street scenes, her eyes drinking in the vibrancy of the entire colour wheel. She knew what she was seeing. The museums and art galleries of Montréal were her frequents haunts. To Lydia a painting on a canvas was what an artist actually touched, looked at, spoke to and cursed.

There was sudden incongruity on the wall next to a bay window. These were photographs, black-and-whites of a village street, women in crinoline skirts, horse-and-buggies. Also sepia tones of rugged mountains. The lower right-hand corner of each photo was embossed with: H.C. Branch – Lenox, Québec. She moved on to a small landscape oil painting. Wallace came in carrying a tray, setting it on the table and poured the tea.

"This is a Pissarro," said Lydia excitedly. "And over there is a Degas and a Renoir.".

"Two Renoirs actually. And there's a Cassatt in the hallway," he said handing her a tea cup.

"Are you an art collector, too?"

Wallace chuckled. "No. I'm more of a…more of an art minder. These are all part of my mother's collection. She was an art curator, had a gallery in London and in Montréal. She died a few years ago and I inherited the collection." He sips tea and scans his eyes over the paintings.

"I'm so sorry. Do you still have the Montreal gallery?"

"No, I had to close it. My work is here. I have sold

many of the works but only to reputable art galleries and museums. My mother taught me who to look for and who to avoid. It's not hard. I had a guy come in here last year, pointed to the Degas over there and said, 'I'll give you five hundred bucks for it.' Hah. It's been appraised at a hundred thousand. I asked him what turnip truck he thought I'd fallen off of and showed him the door. The last thing I want is having this art buried in some rich guy's bunker. So I wait, until the right people come along."

"How did your mother acquire all this?"

"Easy," he said, leaving the room. He returned with a large folio book and opened it to a painting printed over two pages. "This is the current Lesage Auction House catalogue. Do you know this painting?"

Lydia recognized it instantly. "It's *Bar aux Folies-Bergère* by Manet."

"Excellent. The barmaid? That's my mother, Aline."

Lydia leaned in closer to the print: in the centre, a barmaid dressed in a black velvet jacket trimmed tightly around her narrow waist, her large, melancholy eyes seemingly looking at the viewer; the marble-top bar stocked with champagne, beer, a glass

tray of oranges and two roses in a glass; the palms of her hands pressed against the edge of the bar, her arms straight in a pose of rest; and behind her the mirror filling the background reflecting gaily dressed patrons and a woman swinging on a trapeze. Then the trick: in the mirror the back of the barmaid herself, facing away from the viewer. A subtle deception for the reflection reveals that the barmaid is not looking at the patrons, but into the eyes of a moustached man, likely Manet himself, staring back at her, studying her face. "That was your mother? She's beautiful."

"Yes, she was. She modeled for many of the artists. Sometimes she was paid with whatever painting she wanted. And my father, George, he was always bringing home art. Every time he went out on assignment he'd come back with a trunk load of sketches or drawings from all over Europe."

Lydia wandered off to see more of the paintings in the hallway. Wallace stared at the barmaid. He realized it was the first time he had looked at the print since his mother had died in 1942. It wasn't so much because he had shied away from all the memories it evoked. He simply hadn't thought about it and now that he had, it physically hurt in his head and his chest. Maybe that's why he hadn't done it, know-

ing this would happen, made all the harder because another person was present. Looking at the barmaid made him think of the scores of galleries Aline had taken him to in New York, Boston and Québec City. With his mother it was like going to church, sitting in front of a painting and worshiping it silently for hours. "If you want to be a journalist like your father," she said once, "be an art critic. It's safer." He remembered when she was dying that her eyes grew even sadder when she realized it would be impossible to take her body back to Paris for burial. There was the never ending war and the Nazis occupied Paris. So they buried her on the hillside in Lenox with Samuel and Leah and Emma and Peter. At least that made it easier for Wallace to visit her grave and tell her about the galleries he had toured. Lydia roused him from his reverie. "Are there more paintings?"

"Yes, several more. They're stored in an old building in Lenox. Listen, you must be tired. Let's get you settled in."

Lydia could see that Wallace was tired, too, and pretty much all talked out. He set her up in a cozy guest room on the second floor with a connecting bathroom. The house was quiet during the night with only the sound of the curtain shifting in the

breeze. She was always restless when sleeping in a strange bed and sleep was evasive. A few hours into the night she heard footsteps – slow ones- going down the stairs, perhaps up, she couldn't tell. The front door opened and softly closed…footsteps fading into silence. She was alone.

At dawn, Hoop Jr. was at the front door ready to escort Lydia to the train station. They walked up Princess Street towards Market Square, passing the vendors opening their shops, aromas of coffee drifting out. The night's wind had blown the humid air away. All of it made Lydia's stomach rumble. "Can we stop at Morrison's for a cup of coffee?"

"Don't worry, ma'am. Mr. Lloyd-Craig has something for you at the station."

"Wonderful. Did you find anything regarding the frigate?"

"Yes ma'am, got a photograph," he said with certainty.

Lydia laughed; thirteen years old and he owns the world.

Wallace was waiting on the Kingston Station platform and holding a brown paper bag. Hoop Jr. dashed back across the square.

"There's a Morrison breakfast in there," he said handing the bag to Lydia. She could smell coffee, eggs and cinnamon, the bag was steamed moist. "Sorry I wasn't around this morning."

They turned their heads to the sounds of a whistle approaching.

"I figure it's something you do every night."

"Yes, rather than worry about bringing work home with me, I simply don't go home."

A hint of sadness passed over his face and in a moment was gone.

"Were you working on my story?"

"No, I wasn't. I'm always working on others." He paused to look out over the lake. "People think the war is over but it's not. Europe is in shambles. No water, no food, no electricity, no trains. There are millions of refugees trying to get home but in most places, nothing is left, just mounds of rubble. I read the stories out of Germany, France, Hungary. I've been following that story about the Jewish refugees the one you were reading off the teletype. They escape Treblinka only to find themselves in another camp. Do you see the brutal irony of that? Hitler might be

dead but Europe is not finished with the Jews. I hope they make it and I'm going to write about them until they do. They'll set up their own country, Israel, far away from the Europeans who've been trying to kill them for two thousand years."

The train blew past them and screeched to a stop. Lydia stepped onto the first step of the railcar. "So in the scheme of things, my story is small potatoes."

"Not at all. It's a very important story. It'll get done. Just keep your head down."

The train began its slow grind out of the station. Lydia stayed on the step as Wallace walked along with her.

"So you believe me?" she said.

"I wouldn't have brought you breakfast if I didn't."

She smiled. The train slowly picked up speed and Wallace kept pace with it.

"I'll be hearing from you?"

"Yes, you will," he said, stopping abruptly as he ran out of platform.

She waved to him and entered the rail car. Another

person leaving on a train. He loathed this. Every time it's happened to him, they've never come back. He watched the train cross the Cataraqui Bridge and slip into the sunrise. This time he wasn't going to let that happen.

Lydia looked out the train window wondering if she had made the right decision confiding in Wallace. Who did he think he was, asking if she was having an affair with Larson? It's been the same with all the men she's known: yes, women may be 'persons' now but men continue to assume women still get what they want by way of the bedroom. She would've walked out had she not already revealed so much. For this she was risking everything, perhaps even jail for stealing private documents. Maybe when she gets back to Montréal she will telephone him and call the whole thing off. But there was something about him, something she could not explain. The hot morning sun streamed through the window and she saw a young boy standing on a haystack waving at the train. She waved back.

Wallace worked the story for a week and with Damien Chamberlan in Montréal corroborated the details of the golf and dinner dates, the post office boxes, and the contracts – everything Lydia alleged. Winchester gave the cue to publish. When the story broke in the *Kingston Chronicle* and the following day in *La Presse,* it landed loud. The Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers pleaded ignorance and ran for cover. The Opposition party couldn't find reporters fast enough to slam the government.

In the executive offices of Dominion Shipbuilding all hell broke loose. Lydia sat at her desk as a steady stream of lawyers, accountants, and vice-presidents went into Larson's office. There was a lot of shouting. For two days and nights they worked the telephones, had intense meetings but never once did any of them cast an eye to Lydia. In an odd way she felt insulted. Did it not occur to them that her job as the executive secretary gave her access to the very material published in the newspapers? Was she too loyal, too pretty, too stupid to figure out such a scheme?

Stocks in the company plummeted on the Montreal Stock Exchange. The executives bought them up at inflated prices in the hopes of reversing the tide. It didn't work. By the end of the week the stocks had lost sixty percent of their value. Finally the decision was made to sue *The Chronicle* and Lloyd-Craig for libel and defamation. The legal documents were given to Lydia to deliver personally to the court registrar's office in the courthouse on Notre-Dame Street. It was seven o'clock when she returned home and phoned Wallace at *The Chronicle*.

"They're coming for you," she said.

"What took them so long?"

"Excuse me?"

"They were bound to fight back. They were hardly going to say: Oh sure, we gave money to government bureaucrats and dined them and golfed them and god knows what else, all to get a perfectly legal contract on the citizens' dime."

"They're suing you for libel and defamation…serious charges."

"They're only serious if we published lies. I'm a journalist, not a novelist so there's nothing to worry about."

"What's next?

"Nothing. We have a lawyer. We've been through this before."

"How many times?"

"Oh, let's see…a few."

Through the static of the line Lydia hears a faint voice in the background that she cannot discern. Wallace returns: "Make that several. That's why I've had Sydney Broderick, the Second, on retainer for… how long....?"

Again the voice.

"Nineteen years," said Wallace.

"Sydney Broderick the Second? What is he, a king?"

"I wish. If he was, we wouldn't have to pay him. He's our family lawyer, and by extension, *The Chronicle's*. How are you doing?"

"I'm all right. As I said, no one's so much as looked at me except to deliver the documents to the courthouse. Imagine. Me. They have no idea."

"Keep it that way."

"But a lawsuit. I never thought it would come to this."

"Politics and journalism, always a toxic mix. But don't worry. They have to do this otherwise they would have to admit the truth."

Sydney Broderick II appeared in court to represent his client, Wallace Lloyd-Craig. Dominion's lawyer demanded that the court order *The Chronicle* to retract the story. Broderick stated that *The Chronicle* stood by the story and there would be no retractions. The judge, however, did agree to issue a subpoena ordering Lloyd-Craig to appear in court the next day.

Lydia's home telephone rang at 7AM. Never a good morning person, she was half asleep when she answered and all she heard was hissing steam and a thousand footsteps.

"Sorry, I know it's early," Wallace shouted. "You know I'm in court this morning."

"Of course, I know everything," she said, her voice rough. "Where are you?"

"Windsor Station."

"You have your king with you?"

"Yes," he said with a deep sigh. "When this is done, would you like meet for a drink later?"

Lydia hesitated. She had changed her opinion of Wallace since the story was published. He had been true to his word and the article was a good one. But this?

"Is it safe for us to been seen together?"

"I know a place. We'll be fine."

"All right."

Lydia arrived at the executive office of Dominion, in time to see Larson dashing out with his team of lawyers and barking to them: "I want you to crush that son-of-a-bitch!" After that, the office was quiet for the rest of the day. She left at five o'clock and arrived at her apartment on Mountain Street. The telephone rang the moment she walked in.

"Hello Miss Beecher," came a voice in a melodious tone. "I'm Sydney Broderick, Wallace's lawyer."

"Oh yes, I trust things went well today."

There was a long pause, covered by static. "Unfortunately things did not go well. Wallace is in jail."

"What!?" Lydia, set her hand on the wall to steady herself. "Oh my heavens!"

"I'm aware that you and Wallace were to meet later. I'm afraid that will have to be postponed."

Lydia sucked in a deep breath, let it out slow. "I…I…I…don't understand."

"The judge ordered Wallace to reveal the identity of his source. He refused, three times. The judge found him in contempt of court and sentenced him to incarceration until such time as he complies."

"But why didn't he just reveal my name? I don't want him in jail. This wasn't supposed to happen."

"There was always a slim possibility."

"It's no longer slim, is it? I'm going to the court and tell the judge myself."

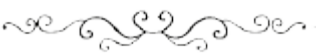
"You will do no such thing," said Sydney sternly. "This is not about you, Miss Beecher. It's about a principle: the right of a journalist to use anonymous sources and to protect the source's identity. If in the future someone has an important story to tell a reporter but is afraid of being exposed for fear of retribution, that story will die and the public will be denied information to which they are entitled. Why did you do what *you* did? You introduced yourself under a false name. You travelled a hundred and fifty miles to ensure no one you knew saw you meeting with Wallace. You travelled to some village in the middle of nowhere to investigate surreptitiously the destinations of the cheques. Why did you do all of that?"

Lawyers, thought Lydia. Why are their arguments so ironclad? But he was right. "How long will Wallace be there?"

"Hard to say. I will tell you, I agree with the principle. Damien Chamberlan, several other reporters and their papers are following up. It seems that the history of bribes at Dominion goes back a few years. If the papers keep the pressure up, Larson might blink. Go about your life as usual, go to your job and say nothing…Please."

Lydia had heard that before. Say nothing. Her parents, forever concerned with what other people thought had taught her to never express what she really felt. Polite girls are forever told to *say nothing*, never rock the boat. It's the reason why ten years ago she fled her family in Winnipeg and took the train to Montréal.

"All right," she said. "Life as usual."



The cell was three feet wide by eight feet long with a smudged frieze of mold and mildew running along the walls, stained in every hue of the excremental rainbow with seepage blotches that looked as if they'd leaked from a corpse. The jail's range extended the length of the courthouse basement and derived no light from the half-dozen slits of grime-clouded glass that overlooked an alleyway. Wallace had been in dozens of prison cells while interviewing inmates in Kingston's myriad penitentiaries. During the war he had visited internment camps in the Kootenay region of British Columbia where Japanese families were incarcerated. In Greenwood, Kaslo, Lemon Creek and Slocan City, Wallace saw hundreds of men, women, children, the elderly, and the handicapped being held in nothing more than plywood shacks. The men were forced to hard labour, working without pay on local farms or on highway construction. Wallace was appalled not only by the harsh conditions but also that these were Canadian citizens, some second genera-

tion. In his articles, Wallace posed the questions of what possible security risk these people could be and why, as Canadian citizens, the adults could be legally confined without having committed any crime. The response to his articles was fierce and in some cases threatening. When rocks were hurled through the windows of *The Chronicle,* Winchester suspended all future articles on the internment camps and ordered Wallace home.

From the end of the range came the sounds of pacing and barking and cursing, the large holding block for the inmates-in-transit – on their way back to prison or recent collars from the street: drunks, thieves, psychotics. They had put Wallace in there in the early hours of his first night but a guard, seemingly one with some rank, placed him in this cell further away from the bedlam.

"So now I'm in solitary, with no one to talk to," said Wallace.

"You don't want to talk to those guys and they sure as hell don't want to talk to you," the guard said, introducing himself as Sergeant Pascal.

"Can you at least get me a newspaper?"

"Sure. You can read all about yourself. You're all over the place," said Pascal. He came back a few minutes later and passed two newspapers through the bars. "Lisez-vousfrançais?"

"Bien sûr," said Wallace opening the front pages of *La Presse* and *The Montreal Star.*

Pascal leaned in closer to the bars: "Reporters aren't too popular around here."

"Why's that?"

"Don't you know? The inmates are all innocent and reporters write about them as if they're not. See you tomorrow," Pascal said, clicking off down the range.

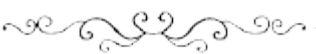
None of the inmates Wallace knew back in Kingston mistrusted journalists. For them a reporter was sometimes their only means of speaking to the outside world. As for innocence, wasn't that universal?

In the silence, Wallace's mind wandered to his father. He had read everything his father had done and thought over twenty years but their actual time together had been brief. Wallace had read his journals several times, even knew some parts by-heart: the search for Dunant; the Boyle revolution. Yet Wallace could still not understand why his father did news

stories that sent him away from his family. When his father was home, he was all there: together they went to museums (more his mother's idea who considered it akin to going to a church, one that changed denominations every week), the theatre, and of course movies, the last time to see *Easy Street* with Charlie Chaplin. At night his father would read to him, Dickens and Zola, and poetry, particularly Shelley. But when Wallace was only thirteen, he lost him altogether. George's final entries were virtually a death certificate: short, dull sentences from a state of delirium. Memories were fading with time but Wallace had his father's deepest thoughts, his boldest journeys, *in writing* that he could read any time. He could recite entire sentences; conjure scores of scenes his father his father experienced. Is the impulse to bear witness, to report, to foment discourse truly that demanding, that all-consuming? Wallace held close to one of his father's entries: *"I do not want to see that look on Wallace's face again when I left Waterloo Station. Wallace removed his beret and waved it at me, his pale blue eyes wet as a waterfall."*

Wallace knew someone out there was going to blink. In the newspapers Pascal brought to him every day there were stories across the board of this unleashed scandal, of "the crime of incarcerating a

journalist for doing his job". The government was taking it on the chin, their poll numbers were slipping down a muddy hill. Someone will blink but it won't be him. So it might mean a few more days in this urine-soaked rabbit hole and that would be fine because he knew his father would have done exactly the same.



On the ninth morning of Wallace's incarceration, at about the same time that he was in court again refusing to divulge his source, the doors to the executive offices of Dominion Ships burst open and the Deputy Minister of Defense marched through, followed by a lawyer.

Lydia stood up at her desk, "Monsieur Castonguay, so good to see you. I'll see if…"

"Don't bother. This will not take long," said Castonguay continuing straight to Larson's office.

Larson jumped out of his chair like a spring had shot him up. The lawyer held the door open making certain Lydia could hear everything.

Before Larson could utter a sound, Castonguay said, "I'm delivering a message from the P.M. and the Privy Council. You are to resign as CEO of Dominion by the end of the day. If you do not, Dominion Ships

will never see a military contract again. The frigate currently under construction here will be cancelled and given to the next bidder."

"But…."

"I'm not finished! You will also instruct your lawyers to withdraw the libel case against *The Chronicle* and have Mr. Lloyd-Craig released from jail also by the end of the day. I will expect a telephone call from your executive secretary confirming that you have taken these actions. No questions." Castonguay turned on his heels and left as he had come in. The lawyer paused at Lydia's desk and handed her his business card. "I will await your call, Miss Beecher. And thank you for all of your help."

Lydia took in a deep breath. Did he know? Did they know all along? And if they did, why? Larson called her into his office and dictated his resignation. As she typed it, she heard Larson on the telephone instructing the company lawyers to withdraw the libel case. By midday, Larson had packed his possessions into a box and was heading for the door, pausing to thank Lydia in a perfunctory tone. She decided that for only the second time in her life she was going to stand up.

"Mr. Larson," she said. He turned to her. She squared her shoulders: "For seven years I've worked for you and in that time you have not had the foggiest idea of what it is I do here. Maybe now you do."

Larson stared at her. "You? I could have you charged with stealing classified documents."

"Bribery cheques? Classified documents? You think I didn't know where the cheques were going?"

Larson shook his head and left. Lydia telephoned the Deputy Minister's office and confirmed that the ultimata had been carried out. She walked to the window, its glass layered in a patina of soot. Sealed shut, the window overlooked the shipyard but the high steel walls of the dry lock cut off the horizon and the view of the St. Lawrence River. Long ago when the window did open Lydia had inhaled the acidic air, smelled the burning coal, and saw the crimson-hot rivets flying through the air and the showers of sparks from welding torches. And there was the noise, the relentless pounding of steel on steel. She closed the window that day and hadn't opened it since. She returned to her desk and typed her letter of resignation. The telephone rang.

"Sydney Broderick here. I suspect it's been rather exciting around your office today."

"Yes, in more ways than one."

"Good. Allow me to add to the festivities. Wallace is being released shortly. What say I pick you up and we'll swing over to the courthouse?"

As she waited for Sydney at the front doors of the administration building, the afternoon shift was punching out and the men were walking to their cars. Lydia knew many of them – engineers, welders, sheet metal workers, electricians, carpenters, riveters, who smiled and waved a good evening to her, unaware of the machinations. They would've read about the bribery charges in the newspapers and that would've made them angry.

Lydia also knew the twelve crew members who were killed in the dry docks - right under her office window – in what they called *industrial accidents*: falls from scaffolding, propane explosions, errant red-hot rivets falling from the sky like shrapnel. Lydia recalled all their names, having typed twelve letters of condolence to the families in Nova Scotia, Sorel, and Pointe St. Charles. Lydia believed that many of the deaths were caused by the men being overworked and exhausted. For six years they never took their holidays, they worked weekends without pay, and it showed in their burned hands, their dark

leathery faces beaten by wind and smoke. One of the foreman told her, "The boys landing in Normandy don't take no weekends, neither do we."

A long, black Packard pulled up at the foot of the steps. Sydney opened the passenger door and called out, "Miss Beecher, hop in."

Sydney hit the accelerator before Lydia had closed the door. She fell back into the seat which was fully extended away from the dashboard so as to accommodate Sydney's long legs that nonetheless brushed up against the underside of the steering wheel. He was impeccably dressed in a suit and vest but had removed his tie and thrown it into back seat. Sydney turned on to Notre-Dame Street and drove west. Lydia looked over to the St. Lawrence and saw its muddy flow dulled grey in the sunset.

"He should be out by the time we get to the courthouse. How are you holding up?"

"I'm fine. I resigned."

Sydney glanced at her. He was not surprised by anything this woman might do. He said: "I could use someone like you in my office."

"I'm not a legal secretary."

"I wouldn't have you doing that. I can use a good investigator."

"You mean a detective?"

"Oh no, I'm not Dashiell Hammett. I don't handle murderers. I'm talking about the kind of thing that happened around you - bribery, perfidy, pouring through documents, those sorts of things."

"I'll think about it. For now, I need some time to…I don't know…do nothing."

"I understand. Just remember, my office is always open."

Mount Royal came into view, its slopes in the full panoply of reds, greens, and yellows of autumn foliage. Lydia did need the time to do nothing but there was something else. She had only known Wallace for one day three months ago and except for a couple of telephone calls, they had had no other conversations. However, in this moment she had never felt such a sense of expectation, of possibility.

"Before we get there," said Sydney, "you might want to get in the back seat and put your head down."

"For heaven's sake, why?"

"As soon as the reporters see you they're going to put two and two together."

"Let them. I'm not hiding anymore."

When Sydney stopped the car in front of the courthouse Wallace was already outside surrounded by a flock of reporters and flashing camera bulbs. Sydney hopped out of the car and ran up the courthouse steps. The reporters were barking questions at Wallace who was trying his best to answer them but it was obvious to all that he was tired. He looked haggard with dark circles around his eyes and the beginnings of a very scraggly beard. When he spoke, he stammered and repeated himself. Sydney pressed his way through the crowd and took Wallace by the arm: "Okay fellas, that's it for now," and led him down the steps to the car.

Sgt. Pascal was standing at the sidewalk and as he passed Wallace shook his hand. "Thanks for everything," he said.

"Just don't mention my name in any story," said Pascal.

"Hey, I never read any newspapers in there."

As they approached the car one of the reporters

spotted Lydia in the front seat and shouted out: "Excuse me, ma'am, are you the informant?"

Lydia stared straight ahead, saying nothing.

"She's just a friend, Johnson," said Wallace as he opened the door and jumped in beside Lydia. "Don't worry, I'll be the writing the exclusive," and they drove off.

Wallace looked at Lydia. "You're a brave one. Stoic. You should be a politician."

She shook her head. "I don't think I want to talk to a politician ever again."

"Three cheers for that," said Sydney. "Wallace, I booked you a room at the Laurentian. I thought you might need to freshen up before going back to Kingston."

"I will. That and some real food. Care to join us, Lydia?"

"Yes. A good stiff drink would help, too."

"Can't join you, I'm afraid," said Sydney. "The joys of fatherhood."

Sydney stopped the car in front of the Laurentian

Hotel. Wallace stepped out, let Lydia out of the front seat and leaned back into the car. "Thanks for sticking by me, Sydney."

"Are you kidding. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. You're a brave man. You did well."

Sydney drove off. Wallace turned and saw Lydia at the top of the stairs waiting at the front doors. He looked up at her, seeing the rays of twilight shining off her hair. He said, "Think of the great story we can tell people when they ask us how we met. I can open with - I just got out of jail."

"And *why* would anyone ask us that question?"

"Because there's going to be a whole lot of story to tell after that."

"Really," she said with a smile. "Well you'd better pick up the pace or you're going to miss all of it." She went through the front doors and Wallace, jumping two steps at a time, followed her inside.

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The Informant

Richard Stanford

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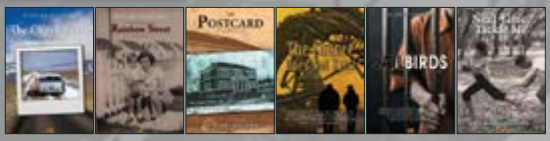
Richard Stanford, When I'm not writing short stories and essays or producing documentary films in Montréal, I can be found mucking about in my gardens trying to create the perfect eggplant.